

Dr. H. van der Westhuizen

Department Historical and Constructive Theology, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of the Free State.

hvdw@ufs.ac.za

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THE SPIRIT, JUSTICE AND BEAUTY?

ABSTRACT

In this article I want to make four interrelated arguments. Firstly, I argue for the theologically important relation between justice and beauty; secondly, that the Spirit of God is the Spirit both of “justice” and of “beauty”; thirdly, that a theology of the Spirit further defines “justice” and “beauty” and allows for a deepened understanding of both; and fourthly, that a theology of the Spirit allows us to understand the ambiguities with regards to these differentiated themes – and therefore highlights not only the importance of the interrelation between “beauty” and “justice” – but, I argue, is this interrelation. I will do this by focusing on the issue of how the Spirit relates, in the first place, to justice, in the second place, to creation, thirdly, to creativity and in the fourth place, to imagination.

1. INTRODUCTION

In his recent autobiography, Nicholas Wolterstorff reflects on an awakening he had in South Africa:¹

I left South Africa a changed person. ... I had not put justice on my personal agenda; I had not thought about justice in any sustained way. Now it was on my agenda. ... I had a panic attack of sorts. My life seemed to be falling into pieces. I was thinking, teaching, and writing about (aesthetics). ... Now God had added justice to my agenda: not only thinking about justice in general and why it is important, but getting myself informed about concrete injustice of apartheid and speaking out against it. Was there anything uniting the



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1 Cf. also already Wolterstorff (1985, 2013).

various projects in which I was engaged? ... What do justice ... and (aesthetics) ... have to do with each other? (Wolterstorff 2019:168).

He already referred to this awakening in a previous publication, when he asked about the relation between justice and beauty:²

Is ugliness connected somehow to justice? ... Is there perhaps a yet tighter connection between injustice and ugliness? May it be that, sometimes at least, ugliness is a form of injustice? May it be that, sometimes at least, a person is being wronged by being forced to live, or left to live, in aesthetically squalid surroundings that give no sensory delight? ... My question is not whether love ... for one's fellow human beings will seek for them surroundings in which they can find sensory delight. Of course it will. My question is whether we are violating the dignity of our fellow human beings when we force them to live in aesthetically squalid surroundings, or when we rest content with letting them live in such surroundings. ... The opportunity to live in surroundings of aesthetic decency is not an optional luxury. Justice requires it (Wolterstorff 2013:221-226).

In line with Wolterstorff, John de Gruchy (2001) relates beauty, as an aspect of aesthetics, to justice. According to De Gruchy, it is important that the theme of beauty is recovered as a key category for developing an adequate theological aesthetics as an integral part of doing just theology.³ Beauty, however, has to be radically revised, he argued, and this in relation to justice. He particularly relates beauty⁴ and justice⁵ to the Spirit⁶ (De Gruchy 2014:120).

2 For Wolterstorff's perspective on justice, with a preface with reference to South Africa on "why care about a theory of justice", cf. Wolterstorff (2010:vii-ix). Cf. also the Kuyper Lectures of 1981 delivered at the Free University of Amsterdam, and Wolterstorff (1983, 1985, 2010, 2011, 2015b). For his perspective on beauty, cf. Wolterstorff (1980:161-16; 2015:305-321). Although Wolterstorff is critical of "beauty", for the purpose of this article I use beauty as a synonym for theological aesthetics, in the way Wolterstorff referred to beauty in his article in the "Turning South" series (2013:221-226).

3 In 1994 John de Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio edited what has since become a textbook for many theologians, *Doing Theology in Context: South African Perspectives* (1994). In an article in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, De Gruchy (2011:21-31) revisits and reassesses *Doing Theology in Context*. As one of the gaps to be filled if theologians were to rethink together the doing of and being in theology, he mentions the importance of Aesthetics.

4 For a South African perspective on beauty, cf. De Gruchy (2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2014).

5 For South African perspectives on justice, cf. De Gruchy (1988, 2002), but also Smit (2005, 2009, 2015a), and Plaatjies-Van Huffel and Vosloo (2013).

6 In his introduction to theology, Guthrie (1994:293), for example, argues that the Spirit of God is related to *beauty*. The Spirit, he argued, "is the source of *all* human ... art (and) creativity" (my italics). Cf. also Sherry (1991/2002, 2007), who argued that although the Spirit has been related

It is clear that, according to De Gruchy, it will be important to reflect *theologically*⁷ – particularly also from the perspective of the Spirit – on beauty, or what I refer to in this article as aesthetics. Elsewhere he proposed this argument with regards to restorative *Justice* (2002:147-180). It is precisely a *theological* exploration of these concepts that allows for a more differentiated argument with regards to beauty and justice.

In this article, I will continue De Gruchy's line of thought by way of four interrelated arguments. Firstly, I argue for the importance of the relation between justice and beauty; secondly, I argue that the Spirit of God *is* the Spirit of "justice" and of "beauty"; I argue thirdly, for a theological, or rather, pneumatological reflection on justice and on beauty, in other words, that a theology of the Spirit further defines "justice" and "beauty", that is, allows for a deepened understanding of "justice" and "beauty"; fourthly, I propose that a theology of the Spirit allows us to understand the ambiguities with regards to these differentiated themes – and therefore highlights not only the importance of the interrelation between "beauty" and "justice" – but, I argue, *is* this interrelation. I will do this by focusing on the issue of how the Spirit relates, in the first place, to justice, secondly, to creation, thirdly, to creativity, and, in the fourth place, to imagination.

to beauty, it is not common, even amidst the flood of publications on the Spirit since the 1970s. Depending on how one relates the Spirit to God will of course add to the complexity. More often than to the Spirit, beauty has been related to God, or to God's revelation in Jesus Christ. This, he argues in his Postscript, was still the case in 2002. Cf. also Sherry (2018). Already in Guthrie's first edition (1968), he argued that the Spirit is related to *justice*. In fact, the Spirit is where there is beauty and justice, he argued, that is, "wherever there is ... beauty, and creativity; wherever justice is done" (1994:294). Also in *his* introduction, already in the first edition (1991) Migliore (2014) argued that the Spirit is related to justice: "Perhaps an even more powerful expression of the doctrine (of the Spirit) comes out of the struggle ... for justice (Migliore 1991:177).

7 De Gruchy, in this way, stands in the Reformed tradition, where the Spirit is the Spirit not only in the church but also in the cosmos. It is interesting, however, to note the shift away from the Spirit discerned in the cosmos. While in *De adem van God. De heilige geest in kerk en kosmos* (1987), the reformed theologian Bram van de Beek, relates the Spirit to both the church and all that is, in *Lichaam en Geest van Christus: de theologie van de kerk en de Heilige Geest* (2011) he argues that the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and is discernible in Christ's body, the church, *only*: "Als de Geest de eigenlijke actor van de kerk is, dan zou men verwachten dat we eerst over de Geest zouden spreken en pas daarna over de kerk. ... Toch keren we de volgorde hier om, niet omdat de Geest van de kerk afhankelijk zou zijn, maar omdat de kerk de zichtbare plek van zijn handelen is. ... Tegenover de tendens in de hedendaagse theologie om de pneumatologie breed te laten uitwaaiëren ... is het nodig de leer van de Geest strikt te binden aan de christologie en de ecclesiologie" (Van de Beek 2011:10).

2. THE SPIRIT AND JUSTICE?

The relation between the Spirit and justice, or the Spirit and biblical law, is one of the main contributions of Michael Welker's *Gottes Geist. Theologie des Heiligen Geistes* (1992), translated as *God the Spirit* (1994). The point here is not to do justice to Welker's understanding of the law and its relation to the Spirit. Rather, the point is to highlight Welker's differentiated understanding of *justice* in and through his understanding of biblical law.

The law, more specifically, the relation between the law and the Spirit, has been one of his main concerns since his earliest publications. This is highlighted, for example, in the preface to his theology of the Spirit. His original intention was to begin his lengthier publications on the most important themes of Christian theology with a volume on God's law and God's gospel. The contents and problems, however, "die Sache die bei der Arbeit daran zu behandeln waren", directed his questions to a theology of the Spirit, the topic that would, in retrospect, inform his entire theology.⁸

For Welker, the law is more than a mere imperative. He reformulates biblical law as allowing *lebensfördernde Erwartungssicherheit*, life-furthering security of expectations (1985:680), security here referring to "certainty, assurances, reliable promises, firm expectations, trust and trustworthiness" (Smit 2017:202).⁹

He differentiates the law into three interdependent functional areas – namely, the legal, mercy and cultic codes. Welker often refers to these codes as *Recht, Erbarmen, Gotteserkenntnis* (Welker 1992:109) translated as justice, mercy and knowledge of God (Welker 1994:108). He also refers to *Recht, Erbarmen, Gottesdienst*, that is, justice, mercy and worship, or, as he states, in secular terms, *Recht, systematischer Schutz der Schwachen, Wahrheitssuche*, translated as justice, the systematic safeguarding of the weak and truth-seeking. Together these functional areas constitute *Gerechtigkeit*.¹⁰

8 Cf. Van der Westhuizen (2016a, 2019).

9 The biblical laws in many ways define the relationship not only between human beings, but also between God and human beings through legal statutes (Welker 1985:682). It is this insight that Welker finds immensely important for theological realism. For him, an understanding of the Spirit is also an understanding of God's reality in relation to the reality of diverse human beings, of God's presence in the midst of human beings in their differentiability. In an article on the Holy Spirit, he highlights that "we recognize that insights into the identity of the Holy Spirit must at the same time give insights into the realism of God's presence" (Welker 1989b:5).

10 Welker continually developed and deepened his understanding of Biblical law. Cf. Welker (1985, 1986a, 1986b, 1989a, 1990, 1993a, 1993b, 1994a, 1994b, 1996a, 1996b, 1997a, 1998a, 1998b, 2002, 2008, 2011, 2013a, 2013b, 2014a, 2014b, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c).

According to Welker, the biblical traditions' references to the Spirit as the Spirit of *Gerechtigkeit* brings clarity to the work of the Spirit.¹¹ These traditions work against the lack of clarity of the earlier traditions.¹²

Welker develops this relation of Spirit and *Gerechtigkeit* with reference to the biblical traditions' referring to the Spirit as remaining on a human being.¹³ The result of this remaining of the Spirit is the establishing of *Recht*, mercy and knowledge of God. These traditions do not refer only to the establishment of *Recht*, or to the establishment of mercy, or knowledge of God, but to the definite interconnection of these functional elements of the law, the establishing of *this* law.

The *Gerechtigkeit* of the Spirit is established, *inter alia*, through the interconnection of *Recht* and mercy. *Gerechtigkeit*, in this sense, differs from the establishment of what human beings would regard as *Recht*. It is neither mercy at the expense of *Recht*, nor is it about establishing exceptions without regard for *Recht*. Towards those who are trapped in unequal relations *Gerechtigkeit* is truly established. The interconnection of the law therefore highlights that *Recht* without the routinized turning towards those in unequal relations, that *Recht* without the routine participation of those in relations of inequality, is not to be described as *Gerechtigkeit*.

This *Gerechtigkeit*, however, is also related to knowledge of God. Without the interconnection between *Recht* and mercy, a regulated public relation with God is not conceivable. For Welker, the knowledge of God cannot be established to the effect of *Recht* and mercy. In the same way, *Recht* and mercy cannot be established to the effect of the knowledge of God. It is only in this interconnection of the law that the Spirit secures, in some way, the *misuse*, *inter alia*, of the knowledge of God.

11 Although, in reference to the Old Testament traditions of *inter alia* Judges and 1 Samuel, Welker argues that already in these traditions, the Spirit is discernible as the Spirit of the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead and life everlasting: "Even the early experiences of God's Spirit are experiences of how a new beginning is made toward restoring the community of God's people. They are experiences of the forgiveness of sins, of the raising up of the 'crushed and oppressed', and of the renewal of the forces of life" (Welker 1994b:65). These traditions, of, for example, Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah, and Saul, however, still lacks discernible clarity in terms of the work of the Spirit.

12 Welker deliberately develops his theology of the Spirit against abstract theories, dialogical two-way thinking, and social moralism. Cf. Van der Westhuizen (2016b, 2017).

13 Welker refers especially to the Isaiah traditions, more specifically, Isaiah 11, 42 and 61. Where in the earlier traditions, the Spirit came upon someone, the Spirit is said to rest, to remain on the promised bearer of the Spirit – which, in light of the New Testament traditions, is Jesus Christ, *the* promised bearer of the Spirit.

For Welker, *Gerechtigkeit*, understood as the interconnection of *Recht*, mercy and knowledge of God, is to be conceived as universal – it is not confined to a people. The result of the Spirit's remaining upon a human being is the fulfilment of this law, of this interconnected *Recht*, mercy and knowledge of God, universally.

To make sense of the universal fulfilment of the law, Welker refers to the pouring of the Spirit, which is not to be reduced to a pouring of the Spirit merely on a people. The *Gerechtigkeit* that is universally fulfilled through the Spirit is directed towards all people, the life relations of all people.

It is in this light that Welker's conception of the misuse of the law becomes clearer. He therefore refers not merely to the Spirit's fulfilling of the law, but the fulfilling of the *intentions* of the law universally. The law is misused by relating *Gerechtigkeit* merely to a people. This is the case when *Recht* becomes *my Recht*, when mercy becomes *my* mercy, and *my* knowledge of God is not differentiated from knowledge of God.

3. THE SPIRIT, JUSTICE, AND CREATION?

Welker develops the relation between the Spirit and the law of justice also with regards to creation. However, the relation between the Spirit and creation can only be understood in light of his continuously deepened and complex notion of creation as found in the biblical traditions.¹⁴

Welker describes biblical creation as the constructing and also maintaining activity whereby different interrelated creatures – *inter alia*, human beings – themselves creating and taking part in the creating activity, are brought into differentiated interrelations and forms of interdependence, that is, fruitful and life-*furthering* relations of interdependence.

The creative activity of the Spirit corresponds to this. The Spirit is not working abstractly in *all* that is. The Spirit is not interested in all in an indeterminate way, but in a determinate way, interested in all.¹⁵

For Welker, it is therefore important that the differentiated activity of the Spirit in creation is discerned *in the flesh*. The Spirit of creation acts in and through what is fleshly. This is important for the argument. Through the Spirit, that which is fleshly is given a share in the *breath* of God, that is, in the Spirit of God, *the breath of life*.¹⁶ The withdrawal of this breath,

14 Cf. Welker (1988, 1991a, 1991b, 1992, 1994b, 1995a, 1995b, 1997c, 1999, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2012a, 2012b, 2016).

15 Cf. Ps. 139:1-7.

16 Gen. 2:7.

this life-giving Spirit from that which is fleshly, not only results in the loss of life,¹⁷ but in losing that which is shared by those who live. The creative Spirit thus holds that which is fleshly together inasmuch as that which is fleshly is given a share in the Spirit that is of life. In this way, the Spirit creates differentiated *interrelations*.

God's Spirit enlivens, is creatively and life-givingly effective, inasmuch as the Spirit produces this intimate, complex, and indissoluble inter-connection of individual and common life (Welker 1994:160).

For Welker this is also true of the renewal of creation through the recreating Spirit, the Spirit of new creation. This renewal goes hand in hand with a renewal of fleshliness, that is, of fragility, dependence and frailty.¹⁸ In this instance, Welker doesn't refer to an orientation towards that which is fleshly, which would lead to death in the midst of life.

He refers, rather, to an orientation towards the Spirit. Through the renewal of fleshliness, a creatureliness that corresponds to the activity of the Spirit, the Spirit brings differentiated fleshly life into *interdependent* fruitful and life-furthering fleshly relations. The renewal of these relations extends beyond nature. The Spirit does not bring this life back to *that which is*, to nature, *which lives at the cost of other life*.

The Spirit brings this life to what he refers to as a *flourishing* vegetation (Welker 1992:163). The differentiated relations of interdependence flourish as the Spirit brings about diverse fruitful and life-furthering natural and social relations, relations that are reciprocally beneficial to each other.

Welker especially discerns the Spirit's recreation and new creation of diverse *social* relations. Where people have written off the other, they are brought into new relations to each other, and this is due to their being renewed in and through the Spirit. *This* is the creation of the Spirit: "the power of God that creates new life relations ... in situations of mutual enmity, foreignness, relationlessness, indeed in situations where each side has written off the other" (Welker 1992:166).

It is only through the Spirit that those in these differentiated relations are not dead in the midst of life, but again able *to be shifted, to be changed*. Through the Spirit they are realistically able *to act surprisingly, to act creatively, to have resonance in their surroundings*.¹⁹ For Welker, the activity of the creative Spirit, therefore, "must not be sought any longer

17 Ps. 104:29-30; Job 34:14-15.

18 Ezek. 11:17b, 19-20; Ezek. 36:26-28.

19 This was also the title of Welker's first *Festschrift*. Cf. Brandt and Oberdorfer (1997).

in the clouds or in realms of fantasy” (Welker 1992:176). The activity, rather, is realistic in the Spirit’s creation of new life-furthering relations of interdependence. In this way the Spirit of justice is also the creative Spirit.

4. THE SPIRIT AND CREATIVITY?

In *God the Spirit* (1994) Welker also relates the creativity of the created to the biblical texts most often associated with the Spirit of *beauty* – Exodus 31 and 35.

The person filled with God’s Spirit shall build the sanctuary and the most important cultic objects: the tent, the ark for the law, the cover on the ark, the altar of burnt offering, the priestly vestments – all the objects that are determinative for *the formation of the palpable place of God’s cultic presence, the formation of the palpably perceptible ambience of God* (Welker 1994:102).

At issue, argues Welker, is an artistry – characteristic of the person filled with God’s Spirit²⁰ – that plans the coherent interconnection of the detailed description and diverse artistic creative processes. At issue is an artistry that sees the complex functional coherence of the sanctuary and arranges the corresponding creativity. He links this artistic creativity to justice.

The ... artistic planning and the construction of the site of God’s palpable presence in every detail are traced back to God’s Spirit and to a person filled with this Spirit just as much as were the gathering of Israel in distress and the restoration of justice and internal unity (Welker 1994:102).

The Spirit’s creativity is *ambiguous*, however, when in similar contexts one can speak of God’s Spirit as well as of the “spirit of artistic skill”.²¹

In an article on the spirit and the Spirit, Welker refers to the ambiguity with regards to *Geist*. For a clearer perspective on the human spirit, he examines “the amazing mental and cognitive capabilities of human beings” (Welker 2012c:135). It is here that he discusses “literature, the fine arts, and music” briefly, as demonstrations of the power of the spirit at different levels (Welker 2012c:135).²² He highlights the fact that because of this

20 Exod. 31:3, 35:34.

21 Exod. 28:3.

22 Cf. also his Gifford Lectures, *In God’s Image: Anthropology* (The University of Edinburgh (2019) The Human Spirit and the Divine Spirit. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WzagPJeNWxk&t=3s> (Accessed: 30 October 2019)). Cf. also Etzelmüller and Springhart (2013).

spirit's power "we should be cautious not to idolize the spirit in ideological ways" (Welker 2012c:136).

Is it possible to maintain this tension and task of discernment, on the one hand, and on the other, in light of Welker's argument of the Spirit's creativity in creation as related to justice, further differentiate the theme of the Spirit, justice and beauty?

Terence E. Fretheim has made a convincing argument about these Exodus texts. He argues that they have to do not only with the creativity of the Spirit as it relates to the doctrine of creation, but to beauty, that is, to artistic creativity and that which is created artistically.

According to Fretheim, one-third of the book of Exodus is devoted to considerations regarding the tabernacle. These detailed descriptions are depicted twice: when God directs them how to build it, and when those directions are being carried out (Fretheim, 1991:263).²³

To make sense of it, he shows how the movement in the book of Exodus as a whole is one "from slavery to worship, from service to Pharaoh to service of God. More particularly, it is a movement from Israel's enforced construction of Pharaoh's buildings to the glad and obedient offering of themselves for a building for the worship of God" (Fretheim 1991:264). Fundamentally, he argues, it signals a shift *in the way* God is present:

The *occasional* appearance of God on the mountain or at the travelling tent will become the *ongoing* presence of God with Israel. The *distance* of the divine presence from the people will no longer be associated with the remote top of a mountain but with a dwelling place in the centre of the camp. God comes down to be with the people at close, even intimate, range; they no longer need to ascend to God. The divine dwelling will no longer be a *fixed place*. God's dwelling place will be portable, on the move with the people of God. Overall, these chapters represent a climax not only in Israel's journey but in God's journey (Fretheim 1991:264).

I find that the Spirit's role is already alluded to in these *theological* shifts characterising Exodus.

It is difficult not to have the pouring of the Spirit in mind when Fretheim highlights the fact that the people are no longer asked to come up to God – that God comes *down* to them. The Divine dwells no longer above but below, in the tabernacle (Fretheim 1991:272).

23 Exod. 25:1-31:18 and 35-40.

The role of the Spirit is also alluded to in his reference to *places*. Fretheim argues that God chooses a place because God comes into the realities of a people for whom place is important. If places are important to people, they are important to God. Because human beings are flesh through and through, he argues, “there had to be a tangible place, as well as sights and sounds, touch and movement ... and the tabernacle provides this” (Fretheim 1991:273).²⁴

The fact that sights, sounds, and touch are important does not however limit God to a particular place. The tabernacle is *on the move*. “Each time it is taken down and then erected again, the process of making and joining is renewed. It is in the ongoing dismantling and reassembling of the tabernacle, day in and day out, that the creation is being formed and shaped” (Fretheim 1991:274).

The tabernacle thus more accurately reflects the God who dwells there. This God who is on the move, again, alludes to the role of the Spirit. For Fretheim, it is not simply a symbol of the divine presence. The tabernacle is a realistic vehicle for divine immanence in and through which the transcendent God dwells (Fretheim 1991:314). “The God who is present is present as the transcendent one. It is as the Holy One that God is present. God remains transcendent in immanence and related in transcendence” (Fretheim 1991:315).

In short – taking together these theological shifts:

This is a God who does not stand above them, enjoying the precincts of the palace while the people plod through the desert sands, with never a secure, fixed place they can call home. This God takes up residence with the people, tabernacles with them. This God dwells, not at the edges of Israel’s life, but right at the center of things (Fretheim 1991:275).

The Spirit’s being related not *only* to creation, but also to *artistic creativity* is made particularly clear in the way Fretheim relates the Exodus texts to Genesis.²⁵

24 Brueggemann, inter alia, argues that beauty is fundamental to the reality of God’s presence in these places (2012:88).

25 Cf. Fretheim (2005) and Brueggemann, Birch, Fretheim and Petersen (2005), and Fretheim (2015). Cf. in this regard also Hart (2014:ix), where he “attempt(s) to situate accounts of human ‘creativity’ – in the arts and more broadly – within the theological context provided by a Christian account of God ... as Creator of heaven and earth”. Although his is an account of the doctrine of creation rather than of the Spirit, he highlights, in particular, Fretheim’s link between Exodus and Genesis.

As one of the typical themes relating creation to the tabernacle, he mentions the Spirit of God.

The spirit of God with which the craftsmen are filled is a sign of the living, breathing force that lies behind the completing of the project just as it lies behind the creation. Their intricate craftsmanship mirrors God's own work. *The precious metals with which they work take up the very products of God's beautiful creation and give new shape to that beauty within the creation.* Just as God created such a world in which God himself would dwell so now these craftsmen recreate a world in the midst of chaos wherein God may dwell once again in a world suitable for the divine presence (Fretheim 1991:269).

In this light he also highlights the importance of intricacy, art, colour, and order in creating the tabernacle. The design corresponds with the orderly, colourful, artful and intricate creation of biblical traditions.

It is especially to be noted that God's creative activity is sometimes mediate, *working in and through that which is already created* (Gen. 1:11-2, 20). The end product of the "construction" in both instances is a material reality that is precisely designed, externally beautiful, and functionally "literate". There is careful attention to the relationship between form and function. God is present and active in both creation and tabernacle, not simply in the verbal, but also in and through that which is tangible. In both instances, *the creative work of God ranges widely across the physical order of things, integrating the world of nature and that which is built with human hands* (Fretheim 1991:270, my italics).

In light of Welker's understanding of and how justice is related to creation – the Spirit's creating related to intentions of the law, that is, to justice, mercy, and in this way, to knowledge of God – it becomes possible to, on the one hand, at least to a certain degree, discern the Spirit in and through artistic creativity and that which is created artistically, and, on the other hand, to be driven towards it. It is to this being driven towards the artistic creativity of the Spirit that I now, and finally turn.

Fretheim agrees that thirteen chapters having to do with the tabernacle is a long stretch of non-story (Fretheim 1991:263). As reasons for the long stretch he mentions that in view of Exod. 31-34 – where, in contrast to the artistic creativity of the Spirit, the people create a golden calf – it is clear that *details* are important. In fact, argues Fretheim (1991:264), "inattention to detail may well have been a major factor in the syncretism and idolatry that developed". Thus, in the same way the ambiguity with regards

to artistic creativity of *spirit* can lead to syncretism and idolatry, so, he argues, can the absence to creativity.

Fretheim highlights that what is created in and through the Spirit is not a once-and-for-all matter. It continues to be made, it is, *in the making* (Fretheim 1991:272). The emphasis is on the joining and threading and making. The point is not cogitation of what is beautiful, as much as that may be the case, but on the activity required to make it so (Fretheim 1991:314). Thus there is a sense in which, by the activity of joining and threading and making the tabernacle, artistic creativity is in the making (Fretheim 1991:277).

Interestingly, artistic creativity in these traditions is punctuated regularly with the sabbath, that is, by *not* creating. In this sense, “they step back from their own creative activity to recognize publicly the work of the divine Creator” (Fretheim 1991:277). It is in the tension between stepping back from their own creative activity, and the recognition of the creativity of the creator Spirit – that they are to be involved also in artistic creativity.

In light of the mentioned ambiguity with regards to the Spirit it remains important to ask about the creativity of the Spirit in light of what has been argued about justice, justice and creation, and creativity.

5. THE SPIRIT AND IMAGINATION?

As a further reason for the detailed descriptions Fretheim mentions that “the language creates a sanctuary *in the minds* of those who have none”. It begins to take shape within, where it can be considered “in all of its beauty” (Fretheim 1991:264). In a way, this creativity also reaches to encompass *imagination*.

Although there is a plurality of terms linked to imagination, Richard Kearney has argued for the importance of the term imagination – also today.²⁶

Modern philosophers developed the basic understanding of imagination as presence-in-absence – the act of making what is present absent and what is absent present. ... The plurality of terms for imagination have at least one basic trait in common: they all refer, in their diverse ways, to the human power to convert absence into presence, actuality into possibility, what-is into something-other-than-it-is. ... It is because we can imagine that we are at liberty to anticipate how things might be, to envision the world as if it were otherwise, to make absent alternatives present to the mind’s eye (Kearney 1998:3).

26 Cf. Kearney (1988, 1998, 2020).

In his introduction to the Old Testament, Walter Brueggemann highlights the importance of *theological* imagination:²⁷

While the text²⁸ is rather boring to read and has been much neglected in interpretation, we should not miss the powerful *theological imagination* at work here (Brueggemann 2012:85).

According to Brueggemann, the literature was given imaginative *gestalt* during the exile.

It is likely that this tradition ... was brought to its present form in the exile, thus a tradition of *presence* in a context of deeply felt *absence* ... the present formulation is understood as an imaginative act whereby *Presence* would be assured in *absence* (Brueggemann 2012:85).

In *Imagining Theology: Encounters with God in Scripture, Interpretation, and Aesthetics* (2020) Garrett Green links the biblical traditions to imagination. He differentiates between imagination used in imaginary ways and a *realistic* imagination (Green 2020:12). According to Green, this realistic imagination functions “throughout experience, enabling us to envision the whole of things, to focus our minds to perceive how things are ordered and organized – in other words, it allows us to see what is *really* there” (Green 2020:10, my italics).

Already in his introduction, Green asks about a *normative* use of imagination, and sketches some of those norms for Christian theology (Green 2020:1-22). The first norm of theological imagination is foundational, he argues: “The Bible embodies the concrete paradigm on which all Christian theology is based, enabling whoever to rightly imagine God” (Green 2020:12).

According to him, theology involves interpretation of a foundational text. In *Theology, Hermeneutics, Imagination* (2007) he argues that a realistic imagination therefore has to do with an interpretive imagination. For him, imagination is a hermeneutic key.

In *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (1989) Green links this imaginative hermeneutic to the Holy Spirit. In the preface to the paperback edition (1998:vii), in response to the question of whether his theology does create space not only for “reproductive imagination”, but also for “productive imagination”, Green argues that the human imagination is responsive in many ways. For him, however, the imagination of Christians

27 Cf. also Brueggemann (1978/2018, 1997/2012, 2003/2012).

28 The thirteen chapters having to do with the tabernacle.

of all sorts – not simply the artistic – “is impressive and multifaceted, and is in no way compromised by the insistence that its spontaneity is not in its created self but rather in ... God the Holy Spirit” (Green 1998:viii).

The metaphor of imagination, he argued again in his most recent book,

invites us to use the Bible not simply as something we look at but *through* in order to see reality and its relation to God in a new way (Green 2020:14).

According to Green, it is in the Spirit through the biblical traditions – almost, I argue, like the detailed description of the sanctuary in their minds – that we learn to see differently.²⁹

Learning to see things differently is central to the theology of John de Gruchy, as became clear already in *Seeing things differently* (2000). The title, he argued, “sums up a central theme in the Christian gospel, namely that we are called ... to see things from a totally different perspective”.

This was picked up by Dirk J. Smit in an article in a *Festschrift* for De Gruchy, *Theology in Dialogue* (2002), on the impact of the Arts on religious thought. According to Smit, one of the implications of apartheid was the fact that South Africans did not “see” in the same way.

De Gruchy was a theologian in a society in which people lived in different worlds and perceived life, history, one another, in radically diverse ways. They also saw ethical issues in these diverse ways. Even what were regarded as ethical problems, dilemmas and challenges differed drastically. They obviously also disagreed with regards to proper responses to moral challenges and solutions to ethical dilemmas, but, even before they disagreed about responses and courses of action, *they already disagreed fundamentally about what they saw or failed to see, what they experienced and accepted as moral challenges and what they ignored or overlooked. Even social theories reflected the visions of those that were looking* (Smit 2002:272; my italics).

29 This, however, does not mean that imagination is merely of the *mind*: “Right imagination of God is a movement not only of the head - our mind or intellect - but also of the heart, our feelings and affective responses. ... Emphasizing the centrality of imagination in theology can sometimes lead to a serious misunderstanding of Christian experience. The centrality of the visual metaphor (suggested by the word imagination itself) can tempt us to overemphasize the rational or intelligible. Scripture, conceived as the spectacles of imagination, may then appear to be primarily a means of seeing clearly, which can mislead us into thinking that right imagination is mainly a matter of mind or intellect” (Green 2020:14, 15).

As in the minds of those imagining the sanctuary where God is to be worshiped, it is in worship that we learn to see differently. *There we imagine a different world.*³⁰

In a lecture on imagining a different world, Smit would again, in reference to De Gruchy, refer to worship as the place where we imagine the world differently:

It is in ... worship where the church imagines a different world. It is in ... worship where the church learns to see differently It is in ... worship where the church learns to see the world in the light of Christ, which is *the* paramount theological activity for Christians ... Recent decades witnessed a flood of literature affirming these rich relationships between liturgy, imagination and life – whether in liturgical studies, ecumenical work, doctrinal theology, theological ethics, or public theology. ... It is in worship that the church looks in the right direction, thinks its way into God’s world, learns to see ourselves and others differently and to speak about ourselves and others differently (Princeton Theological Seminary (2018) *With Sighs Too Deep For Words*? – *Imagining a Different World*).³¹

In this way, he links worship and the way we *do* theology, links theology to ethics. Why, asks Smit, is worship so important for learning to see? Smit answers by referring to the *Ungleichzeitigkeit* of worship. According to him, worship has to do with time, with the past, future and present. In worship, those who worship relate to their past. Because of this, they look forward to a future. And because of this past-future relation, their present is imagined differently.

The *Ungleichzeitigkeit* of (worship) with everyday realities, the distance, the tension, between (worship) and the present, makes ethics possible – and necessary. This tension, caused by the distance-in-time, is *creative* (Smit 2002:276, my italics).

Smit also discerns this tension in the theology of Russel Botman, whom Smit described as an “illustration of creative ... imagination” (Smit 2018:725).³² With Smit, Botman would refer to the present “as if it were not”.³³ “Whatever exists”, they argued, “is continually relativized by that which can be and that which must be and that which undoubtedly shall be” (Botman and Smit 1988:76, 78).

30 Cf. in this regard also Wolterstorff on liturgy and justice (1991, 2015c, 2018), also his 2014 Annual Kuyper Prize Lecture on Art, Justice and Liturgy.

31 Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VC2-w_zTDV4&t=4s (Accessed: 26 March 2018).

32 Cf. e.g. Botman (1994, 2000).

33 This was also the title of Smit’s *Om te leef asof nie* (2014), dedicated to Botman.

In Botman's inaugural address (2001), he would later refer directly to the importance of imagination:

Only ... imagination could look for and see the new acts of God in this world. ... We are invited to imagine the future by seeing new, surprising divine acts in this world. If you can imagine it, you will see it (Botman 2002:29).

In another article dedicated to Botman, Smit argued that for Botman, this imagination should *not* be likened "with any human projects, programs and prescriptions, identified with our *own* dreams" (Smit 2015:622, my italics).³⁴ According to Botman himself, imagination asks for "a hermeneutical readjustment to the sites of the poor and the marginalized in the world ... where imagination originates" (Botman 2002:29).

The mentioned ambiguity with regards to the Spirit therefore also demands asking about imagination in light of justice, also creation and justice, creativity and imagining a *different* world.

Already in *Cry Justice!* (1986a) John de Gruchy reflected on the ways in which worship can be *used*.³⁵ In reference to De Gruchy, Smit recently argued that worship is ambivalent, in reality often more a reflection of the way things are than a creative and imaginative *interruption* of what is, allowing those who worship to see differently:

As someone who grew up in the white Dutch Reformed Church, studied theology, became a minister, and served in a congregation, I cannot really remember any sermons in which apartheid was explicitly justified or even mentioned. By the time I grew up, it was no longer necessary. It was already in place, it was the way things were, in our congregations, our worship, our life together, our white communities, our apartheid society. It was enough that no-one said anything. The power of the ideology and of the false worship lay in the silence. The grip of the false piety was made possible *because no-one imagined any alternative, no-one spoke of what could be. ...* The power of ideology lies in the reification, in making people accept that this is simply the way things are. ... The danger in worship is not to imagine and to long ... (Princeton Theological Seminary (2018) *With Sighs Too Deep For Words*? – *Imagining a Different World*).³⁶

34 For the importance of "dreaming" in South African theology, cf. Boesak, Weusmann, Amjad-Ali (2010) and Boesak (2005, 2014).

35 Cf. also De Gruchy (1986b).

36 Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VC2-w_zTDV4&t=4s (Accessed: 26 March 2018).

Interestingly Smit links this imagination and *longing* to the Spirit.³⁷

We can only groan in unformed longings, yet ... God's Spirit is the author in us of these very longings. ... Through God's Spirit we may sigh with unformed longings and imagine a different world together (Princeton Theological Seminary (2018) *With Sighs Too Deep For Words*? – *Imagining a Different World*).³⁸

Thus imagination is not confined to a set way of imagining. Rather, it is characterized by a longing of *the Spirit* – as we do not know what to long for. Thus imagination attains a quality of *mystery*.

During an interview De Gruchy argued that not knowing, unknowing and mystery are central to what it means to do theology. For this reason of seeing things differently, aesthetics and the arts are so important for a theology – also of the Spirit.

Our knowledge of the ineffable or ultimate mystery is a process of unknowing, clearing the decks, seeking simplicity, allowing oneself to be led. Theology is far more than a discipline, it is that of course, but it is a *journey full of twists and turns, surprises, discoveries, sufferings and joys*. I am intrigued by how it will end ... but that is the mystery we celebrate and cannot finally explain. And we certainly cannot capture it all in the books we write and read. Rational theological discourse is undoubtedly important, and I have contributed my fair share to the enterprise. But I cannot capture the ineffable in this way, nor can I fully explain what I mean by mystery to others or myself if confined to this medium. *This is where the turn to the aesthetic becomes so important for me. Aesthetic understood as the word literally means, seeing things differently. "Seeing" implies an alternative way of being apprehended by truth, goodness and beauty. This is the realm of poetry and art, where language transgresses boundaries. For, after all, doing theology is all about that, going where perhaps we should not go yet, being drawn or led towards something beyond ourselves ...* How does that experience of mystery find expression, and what does it mean for us at present? That is the ultimate theological question and task (De Gruchy 2014:3, my italics).

This is also important for Green in *Imagining theology*. Also according to him, the theological use of imagination must allow for the mystery of God and therefore also allow for novelty. He links an imagination allowing for mystery and novelty *to the Spirit*. In fact, according to Green, it is the Spirit

37 For Smit on the Spirit, cf. Smit (1992:231-242,1998, 2001).

38 Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VC2-w_zTDV4&t=4s (Accessed: 26 March 2018).

that allows for theological imagination. For him, “theological imagination is dependent on the Holy Spirit” (Green 2020:19).

In turn, and in light of creativity, I would argue that this imagination in and through the Spirit – characterised by mystery and novelty – when linked to justice – is also discernible in the arts – on the one hand, linked to diverse forms of literature, and, on the other, to art.³⁹

6. PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

In this article I wanted to state four interrelated arguments. I argued for the theologically important relation between justice and beauty – that the Spirit of God *is* the Spirit both of “justice” and of “beauty”, that a theology of the Spirit further defines “justice” and “beauty”, and that a theology of the Spirit allows us to understand the ambiguities with regards to these differentiated themes – and therefore highlights not only the importance of the interrelation between “beauty” and “justice” – but, I argued, *is* this interrelation.

A theology of the Spirit – specifically, the interconnection between the Spirit of justice and the Spirit of creation – allows us to discern the Spirit that works in and through human beings – also in and through their artistic creativity and imagination. In *this* way, the Spirit does “have the potential to awaken sensibility to reality in all its ugliness and beauty. It enhances life ... but also allows us see in new and sometimes startling ways what would otherwise be hidden from sight” (De Gruchy 2014:114).

39 In *Rethinking Art* (2015), Wolterstorff links art to the social practices, for example, of “memorial art” (123-166), “art of veneration” (167-194), “protest art” (195-254), “art that enhances” (255-272).

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